PORTUGAL AND THE GREAT WAR

I – GENERAL CONDITIONING FACTORS

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The Governments of Portugal dominated by the Democratic Party, the most radical of the republican groupings, found it difficult to provoke belligerence in the 1st World War, to do so having to force the will of their main ally (United Kingdom) and the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese people.



The Democratic Party was one of the three parties formed following the division of the old Portuguese Republican Party. Its uncontested leader was Afonso Costa, who skilfully gathered round him the most radical faction of the republicans, giving them a project to seize power. The Democratic Party dominated the republican electoral apparatus and relied on the support of the major part of the groups of armed civilians who controlled the streets. These were its two major trump cards: when in opposition it made it impossible for the other parties to govern through its control of the streets and when elections are called, it usually won through its control of the electoral apparatus. The Democratic Party was the core nucleus of the "war faction", the political current that wished to force Portuguese belligerence at any cost.

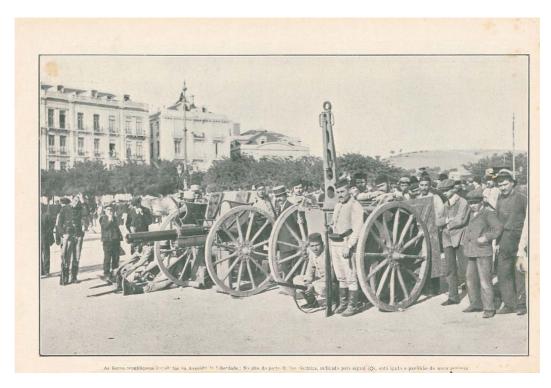
In this text we will try to understand the reasons why and the way in which this was done, not to make a value judgement but simply to explain what happened. This is a complex and polemic matter which must be developed on different fronts to be understood.

What were the conditionalities behind Portuguese belligerence? Basically they were five, both internal and external, which we will examine one by one:

- 1) The fragility of the recently-installed republican regime;
- 2) The regime's policy on the Armed Forces;
- 3) Weakening relations with England and the dangers for the Empire;
- 4) The Spanish monarchy's wish to intervene in Portugal;
- 5) The rapid change in the play of forces in southern Europe.

1 - THE WEAKNESS OF THE RECENTLY-INSTALLED REPUBLICAN REGIME

The Republic was proclaimed on the morning of 5 October 1910 from the balcony of Lisbon Town Hall, following a revolution that began on the night of 3 October. Most of the fighting mainly took place in greater Lisbon (an area covering Barreiro to Almada on the south bank, and as far as Loures, Cascais and Sintra on the north bank). The rest of the country, as well as the islands and the colonies, were left out.



The Rotunda shortly after the republican victory in a photograph of Ilustração Portuguesa. The support of the first Artillery Regiment was crucial to the republican victory, for it was the only artillery unit in the capital and was equipped with a Schneider TR 75, which was a fast-firing weapon. Half a dozen pieces placed at the top of the Rotunda were sufficient to prevent an attack from the royalist forces, which outnumbered them greatly, and to control the main points of the capital. This photograph shows another factor that also helped the republican victory: groups of armed civilians.

The republicans planned the movement exclusively for the capital for, as João Chagas said, they were sure that the Republic would then be proclaimed by telegram to the rest of the country after winning in Lisbon – this was the only aspect of the original project that actually took place.

In the revolutionary plan approved by the Portuguese Republican Party (PRP) military action depended mainly on three types of units: the 'choças' (clandestine cells of the armed faction of the PRP) of the Carbonaria, which had infiltrated many of the capital's units; the army units that could be brought on to the streets (it was hoped that most would, but in the end only two did); the ships on the Tagus supported by the Navy barracks, in particular the Seamen's Barracks in Alcântara. All were units from greater Lisbon, both civilians and military.

The Carbonaria 'choças' from the Lisbon outskirts received the mission of isolating the capital from the rest of the country by cutting off bridges, roads and communications, which meant occupying the submarine cable post in Carcavelos and the telegraph stations. It was a coherent

and well-thought out plan, for the republicans knew that anything coming from the countryside or abroad would be in support of the monarchy.



The 9 January 1911 issue of Ilustração Portuguesa published a lengthy report on the artisanal manufacture of bombs which were the main weapon of the Carbonaria 'choças'. The cover shows João Borges and José do Vale, two of the bomb-making experts, which stimulated the clandestine workshops of Lisbon. As explained here, the bombs were made from materials (such as the iron pinecones which were used as decoration on stairs and balconies) diverted from construction sites, and black powder, which was easy to make.

The concept of the revolution manoeuvre translated the reality of the republican phenomenon in Portugal and mirrored what would be the central problem of the new regime: it only counted on the active support of a small minority of Portuguese society, centred in the greater Lisbon area, with scant support in the rural populations. More than 80% of the PRP organisations were in greater Lisbon, party cells, Carbonaria 'choças', political clubs, civic associations, cultural centres, newspapers, magazines, recreation

centres and even music academies and primary schools. The PRP relied on a diversified orchestra composed of organisations of many kinds acting on various levels, but all of them concentrated overwhelmingly in the capital.

The great problem was that Lisbon represented a small part of the Portuguese population, a mere 435.000 inhabitants according to the 1911 census. We are speaking about a society where in 1910 only 11.3% of its population lived in cities (the eleven single urban centres with over 10.000 inhabitants).

Portugal was then a constitutional monarchy, a democratic regime typical of the 19th century, similar to most states in Europe at that time. It is important to highlight that the republican regime would be no more 'democratic' than the monarchy. On the contrary, during the first phase of the new regime (between 1910 and 1918) the electoral body was smaller than under the monarchy whilst effective restrictions to the exercise of liberties were much greater. It was usual then to witness attacks on opposition newspaper offices, to see their leaders beaten up, the prohibition of the peaceful organisation of the opposition parties against the regime, thousands of political prisoners (both in 1912-1913 and in 1917), uncontrolled actions by armed civilian groups, etc.

The Republic, in short, was a recent regime at the start of the Great War, supported by a minority of the population, politically divided, its political activity marked by the permanent

violence of groups of armed civilians, which had been taken over by the more radical sector in 1913. It was a weak regime, one that felt threatened both at home and abroad. Without understanding this key conditioning factor it is impossible to understand anything at all about the reasons for the belligerence.



Head office of Correio da Manhã, one of several opposition newspapers that was attacked and sacked by groups of armed civilians (photograph of the 16 January 1911 issue of Ilustração Portuguesa). In the first years of the Republic the headquarters of political parties or of newspapers opposing the Democratic Party were often attacked. Even António José de Almeida or Brito Camacho, the leaders of the other republican parties were beaten up several times in the street. These illegal acts were practiced by groups of armed civilians, and no citizen was ever convicted for such actions.

MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE REPUBLICANS

5 October was not a military movement as opposed to 28 May 1926 or 25 April 1974. It was a movement in which the military took part acting jointly with armed civilians, who formed the majority of the 5 October revolutionaries. The military acted with them but were always a minority in all phases of the movement, officers being rare.

Among the military, the republicans only had the support of a small handful of officers, the vast majority at the start of their career. The only general was Admiral Cândido dos Reis, who committed suicide on the morning of 4 October when he thought the movement had been defeated.

Army officers who supported the movement numbered less than twenty, almost all of them lieutenants or captains – a minute part of the officer corps. Even these retired on the morning of 4 October, when they thought they had been defeated – at that time, at the decisive moment of the revolution, the only military left at the Rotunda were midshipman Machado Santos, supported by 9 sergeants and no officer. In the navy republican support was greater among the officers, but there were no more than thirty naval officers in total who actively supported the republican revolution.



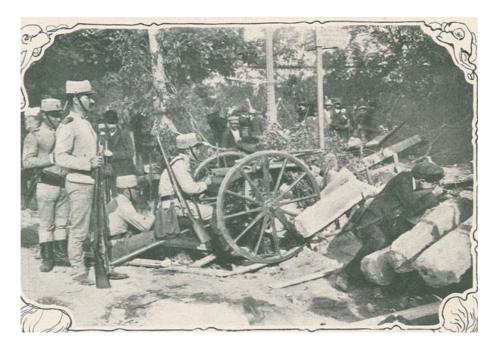
Bernardino Machado and other republican leaders visit the encampment at the Rotunda a little after 5 October. The leaders of the PRP had considered the movement lost on 4 October and the main leaders were preparing to flee to avoid imprisonment. The unexpected victory raised a problem: how to remove the unpredictable Machado Santos from power and control the Carbonaria, the armed branch that gave victory to the republicans?

That being the case, how to explain that the republicans had obtained the support of 2 out of the 10 army units in Lisbon and of many of the navy's ships?

The explanation for this paradox is linked to the originality of the republican support among the military. Since the regicide (1908) the Carbonaria had successfully infiltrated most of the capital's military units, forming 'choças' in a great part of them. These 'choças' did not attract officers but sergeants, corporals and soldiers. The few officers who supported the PRP were directly connected to the party's directorate or to Masonic lodges, but never to the 'choças' of the Carbonaria. It was the sergeants, corporals and soldiers in the 'choças' who, in turn, gave military instruction to the civilians of the Carbonaria, normally at training sessions during the weekend, generally disguised as open air sports activities or picnics in Monsanto. The main weapon of the 'choças' were homemade bombs, but the republicans diverted some weaponry from the units and bought other armament abroad, namely in Switzerland.

The republican scheme to drive a military unit onto the street was quite simple: in the dead of night the Carbonaria 'choça' in the barracks overpowered the duty officer and opened the gates, thus allowing a large group of armed civilians to enter the unit, often accompanied by officers from other units. Together, republican soldiers and civilians arrested the officers inside the unit and brought the sleepy men out onto the parade ground. With some luck they managed to convince part of the unit to take to the street. On the night of 3 October, when the revolution broke out, only the First Artillery Regiment (whose barracks were close to the Rotunda) and about half the force of the Sixteenth Artillery Regiment (whose barracks were in Campo de Ourique) supported the republicans – the rest of the Sixteenth Artillery Regiment

refused to accompany the rebels and in fact formed a force to combat the republicans. In all other barracks the uprising failed.



One of the improvised barricades on the Rotunda serves to illustrate the cooperation between the military and the armed civilians which would be essential to ensure republican victory. This shows the other important weapon of the republicans: the Maxim machine gun. With the Schneider pieces and the machine guns it was easy to defend the position at the Rotunda which was only reached via wide roads, which explains how the approximately 400 republicans entrenched there were able to repel the attack of the royalists who theoretically had more than 4000 soldiers. Photograph of Ilustração Portuguesa.

A REGIME WITH NO MILITARY SUPPORT

The Republic was victorious on 5 October, but the republican leaders knew perfectly well that they did not have the support of the corps of professional officers that formed the backbone of the Armed Forces. This was one of the central problems of the new regime: how to survive without the active support of the Armed Forces, particularly taking into account that a period of serious crises and upheavals was approaching and that the regime only had the support of a minority of the population?

The answer to this central question was not simple and strongly affected Portugal's participation in the Great War. The answer that prevailed was that of the Democratic Party, the more radical nucleus of the old PRP, which dominated political life after 1912.

What the republican radicals did to consolidate their weak hold on power was to create internal divisions within the Armed Forces, which became politicised at all levels. In the first place they kept up in the barracks the 'choças' of sergeants and corporals, who started spying on suspect officers and denouncing all those they considered not quite in favour of the new regime. The sergeants acquired enormous power within the barracks, for they had directly links to the political power through the secret clubs, and one denunciation of theirs was enough to terminate an officer's career. Obviously, this totally destroyed the force's discipline and cohesion; to survive most officers gave up maintaining discipline, accepted the sergeants' misbehaviour and adopted a defensive attitude, staying away from their men.

The second step in the destruction of the Armed Forces was to encourage the small nucleus of republican officers to organise themselves into political clubs, where they became known as the "young Turks". They were not many, mostly lieutenants and captains, but they had considerable weight. They were chosen for the more sensitive positions and one word of criticism from them would see an officer transferred to the colonies or worse places.

In time and to withstand all this of the most officers also organised themselves into "political clubs" of varied hues, all of them secret, all of them as many centres of conspiracy. In 1914, the officer corps was in disarray, with numerous lodges and political clubs, some Masonic in origin, others directly partisan or based on personal sympathies, equally centres of conspiracy. One of the first things that English officers noted in the Portuguese Expeditionary Force (PEF) when it reached France was the great divisiveness among the officer corps, which were organised into clandestine political clubs that conspired against each other, lacking cohesion and failing to function as a unit. This was the norm after 1911.



One of the first "Voluntary Battalions of the Republic". They were one of the solutions found by the Provisional Government to absorb the 'choças' of the Carbonaria and remove them from under the control of Machado Santos, whom it did not trust. These were groups of armed civilians, formerly acting as 'choças'. As shown in the photograph they were trained by the republican corporals and sergeants and whenever necessary infiltrated the barracks. When the PRP divided, the battalions of armed civilians also divided, most of them having followed the Democratic Party. They were semi-legal and continued as an effective armed force until the end of the regime. In many of the armed movements in the years 1910-1918, such as the May 1915 revolution, for instance, or fighting the royalist incursions, the civilian battalions were the main armed force.



The 30 January 1911 issue of Ilustração Portuguesa shows a photograph of the ceremony to hand over the flag to the volunteer battalions (armed civilians) which was held in Largo do Município. Here you can see lines of uniformed soldiers, mixed with the civilians, which illustrates forms of normal activity of the groups of armed civilians who discharged their actions through their connections to the secret clubs of corporals and sergeants in the barracks.

It was not enough to politicise the army sergeants and officers, however; this weakened the force but did not annul its action. The third defence of the regime consisted in maintaining the groups of armed civilians issuing from the Carbonaria in a semi-legal position. There was no law allowing the existence of these political gangs, but as the republican governments were quick to allow anyone who defended them to carry a gun, neither was there a law to forbid them and even had it existed it would not have been applied. Legal façades and pretexts were actually found to maintain these groups of armed civilians, as was the case of the creation of the "volunteer battalions" to defend the Republic, where civilians mingled with the 'choças' of sergeants and corporals that existed inside the barracks.

This was the normal scheme of things in the early days of the republican regime: theoretically there was maximum liberty but the groups of armed civilians were there to mete out its application. A newspaper that engaged in anti-regime propaganda could be sure that its headquarters would be sacked and destroyed whilst the police and the GNR looked on impassively. The groups of armed civilians operated in all the republican coups, either entering the barracks to overpower units, conspiring with the sergeants to do so, or organising themselves to engage in street fighting with improvised weapons and bombs (the so-called "civilian artillery").

The fourth defence of the regime consisted in creating the National Republican Guard (GNR), parallel to the Army, where it concentrated the more trustworthy officers. The GNR received military weapons and training for street fighting and from the very start it was considered as a

praetorian force of the regime, a counterweight to the conservative army that would be able to control the streets of Lisbon with the support of the groups of armed civilians.

The fifth defence of the regime consisted in developing its "own" navy, the branch that most supported the republican revolution. The Navy was concentrated in Lisbon where it had an important standing infantry force in the "Seamen's Barracks" and the Navy Arsenal. These two installations on land dominated the Alcântara — Praça do Comércio axis, supported by fire from the ships on the Tagus. This gave the Navy control over the riverfront area of Lisbon, which is vital to dominate the city. In several of the Republic's coups we were able to confirm that the Army found it very hard to counteract the actions of the Navy and the ships on the river — the only way was to place artillery on the high points of the city so as to threaten the vessels, but it was not easy and above all the resulting artillery duel seriously damaged the capital's buildings (as was the case in 1915 and in 1917). The only cases in which the artillery on land managed to damage and force the withdrawal of the ships on the Tagus occurred during the period under Sidónio: in the December 1917 revolution 75mm pieces placed in the Rotunda damaged a destroyer on the river which withdrew from combat; some weeks later, in January 1918, the artillery placed in St. George's Castle damaged a rebel cruiser on the Tagus, leading to the surrender of its garrison.

The Navy was considered and used by the republican radicals as yet another counterweight to the conservative Army and ambitious plans were approved for its growth, aimed at creating a naval force in Portugal that was superior to the Spanish force. Suffice it to say that these huge naval plans never evolved, for England did not support them and the Republic's dire financial straits prevented its consummation with internal resources.

THE RAPID DESTRUCTION OF THE EFFICACY OF THE MILITARY INSTITUTION

The defences the regime raised against the Army caused a radical change in the latter. What the regime did, in practical terms, was to subvert the officers' authority, divide the Army into innumerable lodges and clubs along party preferences, place officers under round-the-clock watch by corporals and sergeants organised clandestinely inside the barracks and, to cap it all, create armed forces outside the Army (armed civilians, the GNR and the Navy) to control and contain its actions.

The effect of this process is easy to imagine: the Army's cohesion and discipline fell apart in a matter of months. What used to be a disciplined force with a strong chain of command became an undisciplined force, where officers feared for their future, were kept under surveillance, lacked all authority, and were deeply divided, knowing that they needed to organise themselves politically in order to further their career. This led to a drastic change in the attitude of the officers who for the most part gave up even trying to impose firm discipline on their men, but tried only to survive, many of them being moved to remote locations. The sergeants became lords of the barracks, at least of the Lisbon barracks, where the republicans concentrated their forces. In the rural barracks the process did not go so far, for the Army's most disciplined nucleus was here, although it was the worst equipped and had the least resources.

I will provide only one example of the radical change in the force's discipline. In April 1917, when the PEF embarked for France, the British Admiralty complained of the deplorable condition in which the force left its ships (the PEF travelled on British ships) following the short journey from Lisbon to Brest. British officers noted that their Portuguese counterparts spent the entire journey on the upper deck, never going below to try to discipline their men. The soldiers, corporals and sergeants on the lower decks engaged in brawls, destroyed furniture, even started fires and, to the great scandal of the British, did not use the heads, but defecated where the mood took them — one can only imagine in what state the ships were left, even after such a short journey. The British Admiralty considered this a serious case, particularly as all the reports it received tallied. The Admiralty then decided to summon the Portuguese representative in London (Teixeira Gomes) and the naval attaché to present a formal complaint and ask for measures to be taken. One would have expected the Portuguese Minister in London to say that he would look into the matter and that measures would swiftly be taken to restore discipline, had it indeed been exceptionally broken. One would have expected this... but it did not happen.



The first Portuguese units transported on British ships disembarking in Brest. Ilustração Portuguesa – 9 March 1917.

What these representatives of the Portuguese Republic said is quite enlightening and completely astounded the British Admiralty (the statements were so extraordinary that the Admiralty decided to send a report to the War Cabinet, which was quite an unusual attitude). In that document the Sea Lord wrote:

"The minister (Teixeira Gomes) freely admitted that there was a great lack of discipline, but said that this must be expected owing to the fact that there were many Royalists and Republicans amongst the troops, and there were also German sympathizers whose influence was very strong amongst these troops".

Hardly believing his ears, the Sea Lord asked directly: "Why don't the officers meet the men and try to maintain discipline?" The reply was even more extraordinary:

"He stated that the (Portuguese) officers were not like British officers and had not such a command of their men as had the British, but that he felt sure that discipline amongst the troops was improving every day that they were in France" (Document sent by First Sea Lord J. R. Jellicoe to the War Cabinet, on 26 April 1917, NA PRO CAB 24-11).

This was the army which the Republic was sending to fight on the hardest frontline of the greatest war of mankind: an undisciplined force, as acknowledged by the Republic's own representative in London, it being considered both natural and normal for officers not to be in contact with the soldiers and not even try to impose discipline. This was the result of the Army's politicisation, of the formation of committees of sergeants and officers' clubs, all conspiring against each other.

The regime's action, however, was not limited to these six lines of defence of the party interests of the most radical republican group which alone would be sufficient to render the Army as a military force totally ineffective. The regime went further and launched a major indepth project of reform which was never put in motion although it served as a pretext to destroy the one already in existence.

THE FAILED MILITARY REFORM

The reform project appeared in its purest form in the laws approved in 1911. The main idea was simple: as the numerous professional officer corps was not to be trusted it should be terminated, reducing it to its barest minimum. This was modelled on the Swiss Republic, one of the few republican regimes in Europe at that time, which had a numerous army in case of mobilisation based on the citizen-soldier and on non-commissioned officers, with a small staff of career soldiers.

The 1911 reform contemplated reducing the staff of permanent officers to about one-third what it was, with parallel growth in non-commissioned officers. These would be recruited from the private soldiers — with middle or higher learning (thus mainly from the cities), who would engage in an officers' course for a few months. These officers should form a force based on what was effectively compulsory military service, ending the practice of buying one's exemption from military service and thus bringing into the ranks the wealthier urban strata, where support for the PRP was the greatest.

We will not dwell here on the many ins and outs of this ambitious reform drafted on paper in 1911, but never applied in full. All that has to be said here is that the schools for non-commissioned officers never functioned as expected, that the effective reduction of the corps of permanent officers was too small and that military service was still not effectively compulsory, although the exemptions were now mainly obtained through political requests and not through the system of payments to the public coffers.

The main reason that led the Republic to retreat in its reforming frenzy is easy to understand. What happened was that the regime had to rely on the Army to develop a number of military operations, mainly within the country's borders, and noted that only the units with a strong nucleus of officers on their permanent staff possessed any operational efficiency. For that reason, the regime attenuated the application of the 1911 reforms which were only executed in very incomplete form. The 1911 laws remained valid on paper but were never applied, acting as an axe hanging over the heads of the permanent officer corps. The republican regime had done something along the same lines with the Catholic Church, when in 1911 it approved very radical anti-clerical legislation but only very partially applied it.

There were basically four kinds of operations the Army was involved in after 1910:

- a) Maintaining internal order, acting with the GNR and groups of armed civilians, mainly against strikers and unionists;
- b) Campaigns against royalist incursions from Galicia (Spain), acting in conjunction with groups of armed civilians;
- c) Military intervention in internal coups and counter-coups;
- d) The final phase of the peace-keeping campaigns in Africa, with operations namely in Guinea-Bissau and Angola.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MILITARY INSTITUTION

With the policies to politicise the Army, destroy discipline, infiltrate secret political organisations into the Armed Forces and annihilate the permanent officer corps, all caused by the weakness of the regime, it is easy to understand how the Republic destroyed the Army as an operational force in so few years. Before 1910, the Portuguese Army had more than proved its efficiency in the campaigns it took part in, almost all of them in the Empire, where 98% of the operations were successful. In a few years this efficient military machine for actions on a national scale was destroyed at its base, with the top-down subversion of the most elementary values of the military institution.



António Granjo (marked with a cross), who was later murdered in one of the many coups in Portugal, embarks for France in a unit. Ilustração Portuguesa, 18 June 1917.

When war broke out in August 1914, the Portuguese army was a shadow of its former self. It was an undisciplined, greatly divided force at all levels (soldiers, corporals, sergeants, officers) over which hung the axe of the 1911 reform which was never fully implemented but continued in force on paper. Furthermore, with the start of the war there were two new factors of disturbance in the Armed Forces. The most important one was that the warring policy of provoking belligerence at all costs followed by the Democratic Party further divided the officer corps. Many officers believed – quite rightly – that the main causes of this policy were partisan and not national, and did not support it. This was especially true in relation to sending the force to Flanders, for most officers agreed that Portugal should reinforce its African colonies, whilst adding that they were not ready to fight on the most intensive front of the operation. The second factor of disturbance was that for the first time the soldiers combating the belligerence were politically organised, given the growth of the anarcho-syndicalist movement after 1910. The anarcho-syndicalists were a clandestine organisation and the majority was overwhelmingly against the war and against belligerence, an attitude they conveyed with them to the ranks when they were mobilised. For the first time anti-war written propaganda began appearing in the barracks, which was not within the scope of the usual republican or royalist political currents, and emanated from the soldiers. It was a further factor of division.

Between 1911 and 1914 the Army took part in active internal operations, defending the regime against incursions from abroad and affirming sovereignty in Africa. There was no significant purchase of arms or equipment since 1908 and the Army withdrew totally from normal operations in Europe, so that in 1914 it was totally out of date in respect of the new currents of military thinking or the usual practices of war between major powers.

The 1914 Army was not the force of citizens and non-commissioned officers the Republic had dreamed about nor was it the disciplined, united and cohesive army raised by King D. Carlos. It was a hybrid thing, with one foot in either camp, riddled with secret clubs and organisations, its operational practice comprising only low-intensity, mainly internal operations; it was an institution without soul and without cohesion, a typical and standard creation of a weak regime which feared for its continuity, that spied enemies everywhere and applied the policy of dividing to rule, or rather to survive.

It was with this Army that the regime dreamt of becoming consolidating and improving its external image on the most intense front of the greatest war mankind had ever known! Only someone who was completely ignorant about military matters could think this was possible. The result, unsurprisingly, was quite the opposite.

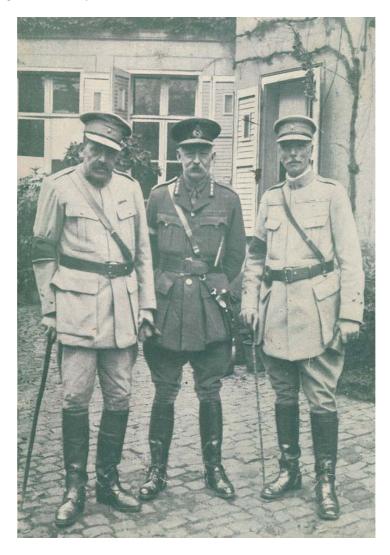
WEAKENING RELATIONS WITH ENGLAND

The PRP would not have dared embark on the revolution without the green light of the United Kingdom. The republicans recalled how, throughout the 19th century, no internal movement formally opposed by the United Kingdom ever consolidated its power, and this became quite obvious in the many coups and counter-coups during the first years of Liberalism. D. Miguel, for example, only came to power in the brief period in which he had the benevolence of Her

Majesty's Government but, once that ceased, he was defeated by a liberal force that was armed abroad and which travelled by sea to reach Portugal.

That was why the PRP sent a delegation to London and to Paris in 1910, to inquire as to these powers' position in the face of a victorious republican revolution. They relied on Masonic links to be received unofficially at government level. The mission consisted of Magalhães Lima, Grand Master of the Grande Oriente Lusitano, José Relvas and Alves da Veiga.

In Paris, the republicans met with a response that was not very committed and can be summed up in a few words: everything depends on Britain's position! In London, to its surprise, the republican delegation was actually received by the Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, McKinnon Wood, who gave a very favourable and immediate response: the centuries old Alliance is between states and not regimes, so that if the republican revolution is not bloody nor interferes with British interests, the Alliance stands. It was the green light for the republican revolution!



General Hacking, who commanded the Army Corps that took part in the Portuguese contingent, is shown here with Tamagnini de Abreu and Gomes da Costa. The divisions at the heart of the General Staff of the Portuguese Expeditionary Force were so great that Minister Norton de Matos threatened to expel Gomes da Costa from the Army if he did not cease his direct contacts with the English, bypassing General Tamagnini. The British command had great consideration for Gomes da Costa and advised London that the Portuguese officers had many clandestine "clubs" and were profoundly divided. Front cover of Ilustração Portuguesa, 7 January 1918.

Behind the extraordinary response given by the number three of the British Foreign Office is a memorandum drawn up beforehand by Sir Eyre Crowe, who was actually in charge of British foreign policy, concerning the position to be taken should the Republic be victorious in Portugal. What this document says is that His Majesty's Government should not support the Portuguese monarchy if it was overturned, but might or not recognise the future regime as it thought best (memorandum by Sir Eyre Crowe in mid-1910, NA PRO FO 371/972). The advantage of this situation was that, whilst the republican regime was not recognised, the obligations of the Alliance were "suspended", which meant that should Spain intervene militarily in Portugal, England could negotiate its position directly with Madrid, with no commitment. In short, London could use Portugal to negotiate its position with Spain regarding the blocs forming in Europe, in which case Madrid was under such circumstances a much better ally than Portugal. That being so, it was to the United Kingdom's advantage for Portugal to plunge into the confusion that would necessarily ensue following a republican revolution, whereby said revolution should be permitted if not even encouraged.

It is important to understand what is behind this British response, for the simple reason that this was the main conditioning factor of the republican position regarding the Great War. Since 1898 the centuries-old Alliance entered a particularly troubled and difficult phase, caused by the sweeping changes in the alignments on the European continent. The great novelty of 1898 was that this was the year when Germany decided to move forward with its plans to build a high seas fleet which could in the long term jeopardise British naval hegemony, the base of its global power. This was the only challenge that London could not accept and regarding which it would have to react most strongly. The primary concern of Her Majesty's Government was to find out whether this challenge was to be taken seriously, in other words, whether Germany, which had a small fleet in 1898, could effectively endanger British naval power.

The Admiralty was directly questioned about this and provided a disturbing answer. The Admiralty considered that the German challenge should be taken very seriously indeed, for behind it was steel production far superior to the British, as well as a powerful industry which meant that, in time, Germany could challenge British naval power. Given this, Her Majesty's Government asked the Admiralty another question: How long do we have? When will the German navy start constituting an effective threat? The response was immediate: if Germany's naval plans are achieved, British naval hegemony will be assured for a further 16 years (that is, until 1914), but after that anything could happen. The Admiralty even took care to translate this into political terms, in case any member of the government was less able to understand the consequences of these facts: until 1914 we can and must attempt to reach an understanding with Germany, providing concessions that will persuade it to desist from its naval programme; if this is not possible, it is better to go to war whilst our naval hegemony is still strong and clear, that is, before 1914.

This was the very simple but absolutely decisive reply which lay behind the entire British policy after 1898. It was a double, apparently contradictory but actually very clear-sighted, policy. On the one hand, London would attempt conciliation with Germany, granting it everything it could that was not essential, but in exchange wanting to be given the assurance that Germany would end the naval arms race. On the other hand, London prepared for a future war with Germany should the conciliation fail, namely by drawing closer to France and Russia. From 1898 the time

limit was 1914 – until then conciliation would be attempted; after that they would go to war. It was not a policy of weakness, but precisely the opposite.

The great British strategy regarding Germany was behind Portugal's problems. A key concern of the United Kingdom was to stop Germany obtaining ports in the Atlantic other than in the North Sea. The fact was that Germany's major strategic naval problem lay in the fact that its fleet was confined to two small regional seas (the Baltic and the North Sea), and could not reach the ocean without confronting the Royal Navy which would bar the way. If Germany obtained a port on the Atlantic islands or in Morocco everything would change and the equation of naval power would be much more complicated.

Accordingly, since 1898 England had been asking Portugal (because of the Azores, Madeira and Cape Verde) and Spain (because of the Canary Islands) for secret guarantees that no meaningful concession with strategic significance would be made regarding one of their ports, without London's prior consent. Both Lisbon and Madrid replied in the affirmative and in great secret provided that guarantee, which was renewed with each new government. This was a key element of secret diplomacy. In exchange for this concession Portugal would receive something of great importance: the secret guarantee that it could keep its empire and that the Alliance would remain in force.

This secret guarantee was so important that it would remain one of the few secrets in Portuguese politics, unknown to the general public until much after the Great War. Between 1898 and 1916 tens of governments were formed, both during the monarchy and under the Republic, of many different parties. Whenever a government was formed, the British representative would request an audience of the new Foreign Minister and ask for renewal of the secret guarantees, gradually increasing them with the passing of the years. All governments responded in the affirmative without hesitation and none revealed that secret, even when in opposition — which is extraordinary. In the final version, Portugal guaranteed that it would make no concession to any foreign power in any Portuguese port without the prior authorisation of the United Kingdom — a substantial part of national sovereignty was thus handed over in secret and without hesitation.

This is a particularly important aspect because in August 1898 England and Germany signed a secret convention for a future partition of the Portuguese Empire. According to this, Angola and Mozambique would be divided, England retaining most of the latter and Germany most of the former. This was one concession London was prepared to make if Berlin gave up its naval arms race. England's skill lay in signing a hypothetical convention which would only be enacted under specific conditions — as Germany did not give up its naval arms race, these conditions never materialised. In exchange London received a concession from Germany that was immediately effective: the green light to crush the South African Boers in the war that began in 1898. It was a skilled coup in British diplomacy: it gave nothing concrete and received something important in return. Although it was secret Lisbon learned of this agreement and was therefore particularly interested in getting closer to England, which King D. Carlos considered was the only way to hold on to the Empire.

The secret convention of 1898 was renewed in 1912 along similar terms but with different dividing lines in Angola. On the very eve of the Great War and despite the many concession

and proofs of submission of the Portuguese Republic, the United Kingdom still endeavoured conciliation with Germany saying that it was willing to divide the Portuguese Empire. The secret agreements of 1898 and 1912 never came to anything because Germany did not accept giving up its naval arms race, the price it was asked to pay. On the contrary, London's increasing concessions led the Kaiser and his governments to accelerate the naval arms race, on the understanding that the more ships they had the greater would be the United Kingdom's concessions. They were bad politicians and bad strategists who failed to understand that there was a line drawn in the sand, a point after which London preferred to go to war rather than continue making concessions – it was the greatest mistake in German politics, and the direct cause of its downfall.

THE MOROCCAN CRISES

The situation on the Iberian Peninsula changed in the first years of the 20th century because of the three Moroccan crises which took the continent to the brink of outright war. The cause was always the same: Germany wanted a port on the Atlantic coast of Morocco on several pretexts, which was frontally opposed by Spain and by France, who intended to divide Morocco between them. England placed all its might behind the last two and that was enough to compel Germany to fall back on three occasions, under pain of unleashing a European war in unfavourable conditions. In the process France and England became closer and formed an "entente" which extended to Russia. The most important thing for Portugal was that in these crises England drew closer to Spain, which then began to be considered as its most important partner on the Peninsula.

Whilst King D. Carlos reigned, this had no great meaning, for no serious internal crisis was envisaged. Everything changed with the regicide. Both London and Madrid considered that the "conciliation" policy followed by a young and weak King D. Manuel represented the end of the monarchy, and foresaw a successful republican revolution in the short term, or a civil war. In the face of this London drew closer to Madrid, seeing the Spanish monarchy as its preferred ally on the Peninsula. This was quite a normal thing to happen for it was Spain that effectively counted to contain Germany in Morocco, in the same way that it was the only country with any weight and significance in the balance of forces in the Mediterranean, which was very delicate at that time.

This was what led to the change in the position of important British leaders, the most significant of them being Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty in the period prior to the Great War. Churchill laid out his position on Portugal in a memorandum dated December 1912, which expresses not his personal position but that of the Royal Navy. In simple terms the memorandum says that Portugal can give no positive contribution in case of war, either on sea or on land, so that its only interest to the United Kingdom was the possible use of its territory, or rather, that its enemies be prevented from using Portuguese territory, particularly the Atlantic islands – mentioning in particular Cape Verde, the Azores and Portuguese Guinea. That being the case, according to Churchill the continuation of the Alliance increased the responsibilities of the United Kingdom without increasing its might. In case of war, Britain had an interest that Portugal should remain neutral, without the other powers being able to use its

territory (NA PRO FO 371/2105). There was no desire for Portuguese belligerence which would only bring unwanted complications and calls for help.

In later documents Churchill clarified his position. He stated that following the Moroccan crises Spain was the United Kingdom's preferential ally on the Peninsula, so that its position in an eventual European war would have great meaning, as opposed to the case with Portugal. That being so, and there being no advantage in maintaining the Alliance with Portugal, there might be benefits in negotiating Madrid's position in a future conflict using the "chaos" caused by the Republic in Portugal as a negotiating weapon. What Churchill says, in short, is that London could allow Spanish intervention in Portugal or at least a great role by Spain in Portuguese affairs, in exchange for the former's more favourable position to the Allies in case of conflict.

WINSTON CHURCHILL'S POSITION ON 5 JULY 1914

The Portuguese Government is not one with which it would be easy to act. We certainly do not want to get so involved with them that if Spain attempts to annex them we are expected to make exertions on their behalf, or to consider ourselves offended by what Spain has done. (...) It is suggested therefore that our attitude towards Portugal should be a cool one and that we should take as little service from her as possible. And if unfortunately Spain should swallow her, we should be in a position to avail ourselves of the cooperation of Spain, in case It is available, and so get any facilities we may require, not only in the islands belonging to Spain, but also in those which now belong to Portugal.

(f.) WC (Winston Churchill)

Memorandum sent by the First Sea Lord Winston Churchill to Foreign Secretary Grey on 5 July 1914 (one month before the war started in Europe). PRO FO 371/2105

So, what was Britain's position regarding Portugal on the outbreak of war? As was quite usual in such a complex situation it was ambiguous.

A significant number of British politicians, headed by the Navy, did not want Portuguese belligerence, was pleased to see the chaos in Portugal and accepted the possibility that Spain might swallow its former ally in exchange for its more favourable position, even if Madrid never entered the war on the side of the Allies, which would be the ideal situation. Other British leaders, headed by the Foreign Office, did not go as far as to permit a Spanish armed intervention in Portugal, but similarly had no desire for Portuguese belligerence; indeed, it considered the continued chaos in Portugal as a way to facilitate its use in the on-going negotiations with Spain, or even in a possible peace treaty to be signed with Germany.

No important sector of British leadership wanted Portuguese belligerence for the simple reason that it brought no advantage in military terms, implied giving substantial aid to Portugal and could be translated into complications in the negotiations of a future peace and of the Spanish position. At the same time, any British leader of any substance did not hide his

contempt for the new regime and its governments, whilst nevertheless considering that the internal chaos leading Portugal to the brink of civil war, with its sudden outbursts of violence, was favourable to the United Kingdom and its strategic ambitions. The Republic, in short, is despised by British politicians as a regime, but at the same time the difficulties it caused Portugal are considered as a possible advantage for British interests.

THE DANGER OF SPAIN

Relations with Spain changed radically following the regicide in 1908. The major difference was that, before, the Spanish leaders considered that the Portuguese monarchy was solid and would endure and, with King D. Manuel's pacification policy, they were in no doubt that the republican revolution would soon win.

This completely changed Alfonso XIII's position. The King of Spain met with D. Manuel and the ensuing public image is of extreme cordiality in their personal relation, which continued the excellent Iberian relation of the times of D. Carlos. The reality was quite different. The meeting with D. Manuel reinforced the idea of the extreme frailty of the Portuguese monarchy, which stemmed from the weakness of its head of state and from its policy: the Government was committed to conciliation whilst the PRP was committed to revolution. Immediately (1809) Alfonso XIII consulted London and Paris about a possible Spanish armed intervention in Portugal should there be a republican revolution that "left the country in chaos".

France gave an ambiguous reply: an invasion would jeopardise the existing balance, but added that France would follow England. One can understand this reply: France did not want a Spanish military adventure in Portugal, but wanted at all costs to obtain Spain's support in the Morocco crises. So it passed on the problem to England, convinced that the latter would pacify Spanish feelings and would support its centuries-old ally.

France was wrong. The British reply was equally ambiguous, but represented a clear break with its traditional position. On the one hand, Alfonso XIII's move in London led the British government in 1910 to decide not to support the Portuguese monarchy in case of revolution, namely through the position adopted by the Foreign Office, already mentioned earlier. Regarding a possible Spanish invasion of Portugal, the British position was that everything depended on the circumstances; should Portugal plunge into a blood bath then international intervention would effectively be required, but in that case it would be led by England. The possibility of unilateral military action on the part of Spain was not discarded but London conditioned it to the more general situation. In other words, the reply of our centuries-old ally nourished Spain's hopes of international approval for a military intervention in Portugal, even if performed in isolation, but implied that this would depend on Spain's concessions in the case of Morocco and on the scope of the European rivalries that opposed the bloc of the Entente bloc to that of the Central Powers. This was the position that Churchill would take in 1912, but it was just more ambiguous, as is normal in positions adopted by diplomats. France was surprised by the British position but continued to believe that the process should be conducted by London in this case, particularly as its main interest was to strengthen the Entente.

The rapid fall of the monarchy with little bloodshed, and the Provisional Government's position of scrupulously respecting foreigners and their properties, counteracted Alfonso XIII's expectations. He was counting on a prolonged and bloodthirsty fight to justify a military venture into Portugal. However, the Spanish king insisted on his claims with some of the main European capitals, namely Paris and London.



Alfonso XIII, King of Spain, insisted more than once with Paris and London to give him the green light for military action in Portugal. Photograph Wikipedia

In May 1913, to give just one of many possible examples, Alfonso XIII travelled to Paris and presented a very tempting proposition to the President of the French Republic: war in Europe was inevitable and when it broke out Spain was willing to allow the Allies to establish a naval base in the Balearics, allow French troops to be transported from North Africa to France on the Spanish railway lines, and create a corps of Spanish troops to fight in France against Germany. In exchange, the price asked by the King of Spain was blunt and to the point: the annexation of Portugal (Maurice Paléologue, Au Quai d'Orsay à la Vielle de la Tourmente, pp. 125-126). The French President reminded the King of Spain that England would never allow this to happen, which enabled France to avoid having to adopt a direct position. The reality, however, was quite different: at least part of the British leaders was convinced by then (just before the war) that Spanish belligerence was sufficient reward for Portugal's annexation.

It should be added that the King of Spain's position was not shared by all political leaders in Spain. The various Spanish governments between 1910 and 1914 were divided about the position to adopt regarding the Portuguese Republic, which is obvious in the ambiguous policy it adopted regarding royalist refugees. José Relvas, Portugal's representative in Madrid and the most skilful diplomatic in the whole Republic, made good use of these divisions and by all means tried to encourage the Spanish politicians who wished to remain neutral in case of war (the Portuguese question was directly linked to Spain's position regarding the war in Europe).

The final result was a compromise, a policy of ambiguity that veered hither and thither. The Spanish governments would accept royalist refugees and close their eyes to the fact that they were arming and preparing for incursions with the broad support of part of the Spanish authorities, but would not let this go too far. When the two main incursions failed, the Spanish government took a few measures to disarm the refugees and keep them away from the border. It was a policy of ambiguity that translated the effective division among leaders in Spain: on the one hand they allowed the royalist refugees to created an armed force on their territory to invade Portugal, more or less in full sight of everyone; but on the other they gave no official approval for that aggression and when the incursions failed, sought to contain them. This policy enabled Spain to keep all its options open, as everything depended on the evolution of the international situation. There was the clear idea that the Portuguese question would depend on knowing if Spain would or not enter the war on the side of the Allies.

It should be added that, both before and after the war started, Germany told Madrid more than once that it considered its wish to intervene in Portugal quite legitimate. It added that should Spain maintain its neutrality, even without entering the war on Germany's side, it would be amply rewarded in the future peace, both in Morocco and in the Portuguese territories.

So, the "Spanish danger" was real and effective. It emerged owing to the internal crisis in Portugal following the regicide which led to the proclamation of the Republic. Its evolution basically depended on Spain's position regarding the war, with society in the neighbouring country divided between neutrality that could go either way, or belligerence in favour of the Allies, as advocated by the King. The sector desiring belligerence in favour of Germany was largely in a minority in Spain and would only be successful if the Central Powers were clearly about to win the war, a possibility that was only raised in the first weeks.

THE RAPID CHANGE IN THE RELATIONS OF FORCES IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

At the start of the 20th century Europe had abandoned the Concert of Nations that had marked the continent since the Congress of Vienna in 1915. Throughout most of the 19th century five major powers had existed in continental Europe (France, Prussia, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy – post-unification), which maintained a relative balance between them, with fluid, changeable alliances and understandings and with no permanent blocs. The sixth major European power was different from the rest: the United Kingdom, centred on keeping its dominion over the seas, the secret and the basis of its hegemony. The United Kingdom had no alliance with any other power – in truth, the only alliance it had was with Portugal, a small

power at the time. London entered into temporary understandings with this or that great power, generally putting its weight behind the weakest, in order to maintain the balance. Its major concern was not "justice" (regardless of what that might be) but simply to prevent one continental power from dominating the others. It was the policy of divide and rule, applied always with art and subtlety.

Whilst the continental powers were balanced, the United Kingdom knew that all of them would worry about their land forces and none would have the resources or the wish to question Britain's control of the seas. If, on the contrary, one continental power dominated the others, London had no doubt that whichever it was it would then seek to build a high seas navy that would jeopardise Britain's command of the seas, the only thing that needed to be defended and preserved at any cost. This was all the truer in that the United Kingdom knew that its relative power had been falling since 1860. At the start of the 20th century the United Kingdom was already the world's second economy, behind the United States, and in some basic aspects, such as steel production, it was third, after Germany.

This was the formula of the Concert of Nations which essentially maintained peace in Europe for a century (1815 to 1914).

In the last quarter of the 19th century several factors combined to change that formula. The first and most important was the unification of Germany in 1871, following its surprising victory against France. A stronger force thus emerged in the centre of Europe, which felt victimised by an international conspiracy spanning various centuries, committed as it was to maintaining its division. Germany complained about everything from lack of access to vital resources to lack of access to oceans, colonies or space and had huge ambition, in particular since Kaiser Wilhelm came to power and removed Chancellor Bismarck, the main person responsible for German unification.

As Germany grew more quickly than the remaining European economies, the imbalance created in 1871 tended to augment with the passing of the years: Berlin was increasingly powerful in absolute and in relative terms and its ambitions increasingly larger.

Germany's great rival was France, which had been crushingly defeated in 1870-1871, when it lost Alsace and Lorraine. Paris had followed a patient policy to contain Germany since 1871, seeking a main understanding with Russia in order to force Germany to go to war on two fronts. Berlin responded to this policy by getting closer to Austria-Hungary, with which it signed an agreement of mutual aid, creating the bloc of the central powers, later extended to Italy. France and Russia had no doubt that they were too weak to confront the Central Powers without the support of the United Kingdom and did everything they could to join London, seeking desperately to create a formal alliance between the three that would help contain the central powers during peacetime and defeat them in case of war.

The United Kingdom hesitated a long time about what position to adopt but understood that it could no longer maintain its "splendid isolation" in the face of the drastic change in European balances with the formation of the two blocs. There was one factor, however, that pushed the United Kingdom into the arms of France: in 1898 Germany decided to launch a naval policy that would provide it with a first class navy. It was a huge strategic error, a colossal error that

Bismarck would never have committed for he knew well the vital need to stay on good terms with England in order to stop it aligning with France (in the 19th century the norm was an understanding between London and Berlin).

The United Kingdom's approximation to the Franco-Russian agreement occurred very rapidly between 1898-1912, marked by the various Morocco crises, that is, by the situation in Southern Europe. Three times Germany tried its luck in Morocco and three times it had to retreat in the face of the strong understanding between the United Kingdom, France, Russia and Spain, with Portugal's support. Morocco ended up being divided but only between France (which took the lion's share) and Spain, with no slice for Germany.

The result of these crises was that the United Kingdom and France drew closer together, creating the so-called "Entente Cordiale", a formal understanding that foresaw a military strategy in case of war. This was Germany's second colossal mistake: having committed to the construction of a high seas navy, it concentrated on obtaining an Atlantic port outside the North Sea – it is difficult to find proof of greater strategic blindness. Berlin had thrown the United Kingdom into the arms of Paris and Moscow, dividing Europe into two major rival blocs on the eve of the 1st World War. It was the end of the Concert of Nations, with the creation of a bipolar European system, an alteration to the central logic of a large-scale European policy.

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Whilst this was going on, many factors of disturbance were piling up in Southern Europe.

The first was Italy hesitating as to its position after having signed the formal agreement with the central powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary), when it considered they were the strongest. But when the United Kingdom drew close to France, Rome started doubting whether it had really chosen the winning side, and began to pursue a dual policy. Formally, it continued to support the Central Powers and undertook to enter the war on their side, should it break out. But at the same time through secret diplomacy it assured France that it would remain neutral in case of war.

The second factor greatly disturbing Southern Europe was the weakness of the centuries-old Ottoman Empire, which had been in open crisis for two centuries. The Ottoman Empire was breaking up, had already lost its dominions in Southern Europe by means of various independences and only retained its control of the Middle East at great cost. In North Africa, the Ottomans had lost Algeria to France, Egypt to England (following a confrontation with France), Libya to Italy and Morocco to France and Spain. In the face of the crumbling of this great empire the ambitions of the neighbouring powers were enormous, in particular because of the rise in the strategic importance of oil, which did not exist in Europe but was plentiful in the Middle East. There was great rivalry in the attempt to obtain the remnants and the support of the Ottoman Empire, principally between Russia, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, the four major European powers.

The third factor of disturbance in Southern Europe was the troubled Balkans, with their immense mosaic of ethnic groups and the recent independences, where states did not

coincide with nations. The Balkans were swept by two very intense wars in the years prior to 1914 and were a huge volcano about to explode violently at any moment.

The fourth factor of disturbance was the explosion of nationalist movements both in the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Vienna, for example, accused Serbia of fostering the nationalist movements on its territory and of supporting the terrorists who carried out bomb attacks, which was true. The great problem was that Serbia had the support of Russia, which threatened to oppose any military action by Vienna.

The fifth factor of disturbance was the effects of the naval arms race in Southern Europe. The equation is easy to understand. In 1914, England had agreed with France that it would concentrate its fleet in the North Sea to contain Germany, whilst Paris would be responsible for the naval situation in the Mediterranean. In 1914 the French navy had 703.000 tonnes (numbers obtained by the author corresponding to the combat units), which meant that on its own it could defeat the navies of Austria (277.000 tonnes) and Turkey (61.000 tonnes), should these join Germany, as in fact happened. However, the Italian navy had 517.000 tonnes and the Spanish navy 88.000 tonnes. Were the four to unite against France, the Central Powers would have 943.000 tonnes in the Mediterranean against the French 703.000 tonnes, in other words they could have naval control of that region, which would be disastrous for the Allies.

So, the entire allied strategy involved preventing Italy and Spain from aligning with the central powers, and the allies were willing to grant every concession to achieve this. In the case of Spain the concessions included assigning an area of Morocco and agreeing to its ambitions towards Portugal, which we have already examined.

The Mediterranean was a particularly sensitive area, then, for the major Allied strategy. The situation was tense whilst Italy did not define its position. For that reason it was important to maintain Spanish neutrality in the first months of the war, and both London and Paris were willing to provide all concessions to achieve this. This was another reason that led the United Kingdom to reject Portuguese belligerence at the start of the war: it did not want to do anything that would tip Spain or Italy into aligning with the Central Powers.

In 1915, Italy joined the war on the side of the Allies, contrary to what its original alignment had indicated. From then on the Allies had clear naval dominion in the Mediterranean: 1220.000 tonnes of warships belonging to the French and Italian navies as against the scarce 338.000 tonnes of the Austrian and Turkish navies, an overwhelming superiority of 1 to 4. From that moment on Spain's position became less important for two reasons. Firstly, it was highly unlikely that Spain would align with the Central Powers after Italy had fallen in with the Allies. Secondly, even if this did happen, the Spanish navy would add a mere 88.000 tonnes to the total of the Central Powers, which still left a huge margin of superiority in the Allies' naval power in the Mediterranean.

What it meant was that the Allies could not accept Portuguese belligerence until mid-1915, for it might cause unforeseeable disturbances in the balance in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the Allies could accept Portuguese belligerence after that date, for they were clearly in control of the Mediterranean once Italy had come down on their side.

PORTUGAL AND THE GREAT WAR – A GENERAL VIEW

The many aspects considered above show that Portugal was particularly weakened in the international field in August 1914 when the war broke, for several reasons:

- 1 It had a weak regime which lacked a solid base of support and was deeply divided, where violence was a normal weapon in politics, and in the last four years had experienced various actions by the Armed Forces within its borders, with many tens of dead and hundreds wounded.
- 2 In four years the regime had seriously weakened the Armed Forces' operational capacity, destroyed its discipline, and undermined it with clandestine groups in the barracks, making them instruments of partisan fighting, paralysing their modernisation and strongly affecting their morale. The regime had destroyed the semi-professional Armed Forces that existed during the monarchy and had been unable to create Armed Forces with citizen-soldiers framed by a corps of non-commissioned officers, which was presented as being its model in military terms. No important reform project for modernisation had taken off.
- 3 Hanging over the regime's head was the prospect of a military intervention from Spain, from whence had come the royalist incursions. The United Kingdom managed this tension by not allowing Spain's direct intervention, but using Spain's wishes as a way to make Madrid make concessions to the Allied powers.
- 4 The secret agreement for the division of the Portuguese Empire had been renewed in 1912.
- 5 The regime made every concession to the United Kingdom, regularly renewing the secret guarantees that no Portuguese ports would be granted to other powers without prior British consent, and replied in the affirmative to all British requests, seeking an approximation by all means.
- 6 British leaders did not hide their contempt for that regime but were divided as to the concrete policy to apply to Portugal. All did, however, agree that Portuguese weakness was favourable to England as it facilitated its secret negotiations with Spain and with Germany. All equally agreed that in case of a war in Europe, the last thing England wanted was Portuguese belligerence.
- 7 France was the only major power that supported the Republic internationally and its desire to enter the war on the side of the Allies. This was because from Paris's point of view Portuguese belligerence was a way to hinder a future peace commitment via a direct understanding between the United Kingdom and Germany, and was also the way to restrict Spain's position about the war.
- 8 However, France's position was limited in the first months of the conflict by Italy's very delicate situation. Until Rome had joined the war on the side of the Allies, the balance of power in the Mediterranean could go either way, so that France moderated its attitude and

did not directly oppose Britain's wish to maintain Portuguese neutrality. After May 1915, when Italy became a belligerent, France's moderation disappeared and it began openly to favour the wish of the Portuguese republicans to force belligerence.

9 – The radical republicans of the Democratic Party wanted at all costs to force Portugal's belligerence in the war as they saw this as a way to resolve internal problems, by strengthening its government, causing a wave of patriotic fervour that would close ranks around the weakened regime, and paralysing the growing opposition they felt on the part of the Armed Forces. As an accessory, the war faction considered belligerence as a way to make England respect its obligations under the Alliance, both in relation to the Empire and to a possible Spanish intervention.

These nine points strongly conditioned Portugal's position and led to a profound division in society between the war faction – a small nucleus of radical republicans who wished at any cost to force belligerence – and the rest of society, generically classified as anti-war, with many hues. The war faction felt that the only solution was to move forward, so that war was the ideal response to many party and power consolidation problems which otherwise would have no solution.

The thinking of the war faction was very simple. Was the regime weak and feeble? The solution was to provoke an explosion of nationalism that would unite the country around the Government that took them to war! Was the Democratic Party increasingly isolated, even among the republicans? The solution was to take Portugal into the war and create a government of national unity with the Democratic Party at its core! Was the regime divorced from the Armed Forces which moved against it? The solution once again was war, which would compel the Armed Forces to unite around the regime! Was our relationship with the United Kingdom weakened to the point where it might endanger the future of the Empire? The solution was to enter the war and force our centuries-old ally to respect the Empire! Was Portugal seen in a bad light internationally and was it losing prestige? The solution was to enter the war to give Portugal prestige! Was the regime threatened by a Spanish intervention? The solution was to enter the war to prevent Spain from intervening militarily in Portugal! The reasoning was extremely simple but was shown to be totally wrong. What happened was exactly the opposite of what was expected in almost all aspects.